

# WOMEN’S EDUCATION IN RWANDA:

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## Uncovering Socio-Cultural Obstacles for Women Pursuing Post-Secondary Opportunities

### INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, Rwandan women have continued to challenge the traditions of inequality and history of their once tragedy-stricken country. They have reached new heights in their involvement in government and political matters; however, the question still stands, “what type of socio-cultural barriers do Rwandan women experience during their pursuit of a post-secondary education?” This study highlights women’s education in post-genocide Rwanda to establish the impact of educational norms and identify socio-cultural barriers that continue to limit educational access and educational success.

The methodology for this project involves the examination of primary and secondary sources that relate to the topic. The research focuses on finding the cultural obstacles that young women experience as they transition into higher education or a post-secondary opportunity.

### SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS

- Lack of resources (poverty)
- Gender-based violence
- Female roles within family
- Lack of female role models
- Female roles within society
- Girls’ health education
- Parental involvement
- Lack of college preparation

### FUTURE RESEARCH

- Qualitative analysis of existing mentoring programs in Rwanda and their impact on education at the college level.
- Statistical analysis of a 4-year mentoring program for secondary level students who participate in college preparation courses.
- Qualitative analysis of school initiatives regarding the increase of parental involvement in both urban and rural schools.

### Country Overview

Rwanda’s long-term development goals are defined in a strategy entitled “Vision 2020”. The strategy seeks to transform the country from a low-income agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based, service-oriented economy with a middle-income country status by 2020 (Human Capital & Labour Report, 2015).

In 2009, Wallace, Haerpfe, and Abbott estimated that 90 percent of the Rwandan population worked in agriculture. Of that percentage, 82% of women take jobs in agriculture as compared to the significantly lower 61% of men (p. 120).



Rwanda has the highest primary enrollment rate per capita in Africa. In 2012, Rwanda won the Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards for its innovative fast-tracking strategies of the 9-Year Basic Education Program (HCLP, 2015).

The World Bank has praised Rwanda’s “remarkable development successes” of recent years, which it claims have helped reduce poverty and inequality in the country (HCLP 2015).

Field of Education	Number of Students			Percentage by Sex	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Education	7,709	5,059	12,766	60.40%	39.60%
Humanities & Arts	2,014	773	2,787	72.30%	27.70%
Social Sciences, Business, & Law	19,676	21,357	41,033	48%	52%
Sciences	5,192	2,634	7,826	66.30%	33.70%
Engineering & Manufacturing	4,087	1,250	5,337	76.60%	23.40%
Agriculture	2,720	1,380	4,100	66.30%	33.70%
Health & Welfare	3,977	3,985	7,962	49.90%	50.10%
Service	6,922	2,068	8,990	77.00%	23.00%
Total	52,297	38,506	90,803	57.60%	42.40%

Table 1: Tertiary Students by Fields of Education in 2016 (MINEDUC, p. 56).

### DISCUSSION

This study served as an investigation of the main socio-cultural barriers that exist in Rwanda for women who are pursuing a post-secondary education or vocational opportunity. It is not a single barrier that impacts a woman’s life; rather it is a combination of different barriers that can negatively affect a woman’s educational journey. The severity of the barriers differs for each student and can be dependent on the region in which the young woman lives. In primary education, Rwanda has been very successful in ensuring that both girls and boys have equal opportunities to attend.

•In 2016, the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) reported that 50.1% of girls were enrolled along with 49.9% of boys (p. 21).

However, the gap in completion rates begins to change significantly when students reach the secondary or post-secondary levels.

•The MINEDUC also reported that 70% of males were enrolled in tertiary level public education, compared to the 30% of girls (2016, p. 54).

The gap between men and women grows even more for Ph.D. level degrees.

•Women account for 10.9% of the students who are pursuing a doctoral degree, as compared to the much higher 89.1% of men (MINEDUC, 2016, p. 55).

The socio-cultural barriers that contribute to the difference in enrollment percentages affect a girl early in her life. Among the major issues that affect girls at school are responsibilities within the family home, financial stress, lack of female role models, and gender-based violence.

### KEY REFERENCES

Human Capital and Labor Report (HCLP). (2015). Country report. Human Capital Research Portal.

MINEDUC. (2016). Education statistical yearbook. Ministry of Education: Republic of Rwanda.

Wallace, C., Haerpfer, C., & Abbott, P. (2008). Women in Rwandan politics and society. *International Journal Of Sociology*, 38(4), 111-125.